What is the Water Quality in the Rolling Fork Watershed?

Rolling Fork Watershed

The Rolling Fork River begins in the Outer Bluegrass Region and flows into the Knobs Region and joins the Salt River. The major tributary of the Rolling Fork River is the Beech Fork, which also flows primarily from the Outer Bluegrass Region. The Rolling Fork River watershed is located in parts of Nelson, Washington, Mercer, Boyle, Marion, LaRue, Hardin, Casey, and Anderson counties. The landscape is characterized as gently rolling hills in the headwaters to very steep slopes and broad, nearly level bottomlands near the mouth.

The major land use is agriculture, primarily pasture and hay land with some row crops; this use represents 59%. Forest covers 38% of the watershed with residential and urban covering 3%.

Water quality in a large number of streams in the Rolling Fork watershed is unknown or has not been assessed.

Water Quality and Ecological Health

Water quality is monitored at 14 sites throughout the Rolling Fork River watershed. The primary water quality problem identified by these sites is high fecal coliform (bacteria) during summer low-flow periods. The potential sources for the high fecal coliform are septic systems and livestock farming operations.

The Chaplin River which flows into Beech Fork above Maud is classified as good, as is Beech Fork. The water quality in Beech Fork between Maud and Fredericktown is classified as fair. The remainder of Beech Fork to its confluence with the Rolling Fork is good. Three small tributaries in the upper watershed of the Rolling Fork have segments classified as fair to poor as indicated on the map to the right. The Rolling Fork below the confluence of Beech Fork is classified as only fair. It is important to note the large number of streams in the entire Rolling Fork watershed for which the water quality is unknown or has not been assessed.

Department of Fish and Wildlife fisheries biologists have reported the fish population and diversity as very good. Waterfowl and mammals in and along the river are quite common. However, the ecological health of the watershed has not been fully assessed according to the criteria established for determining fishable and swimmable waters.

Streambank stabilization efforts on the Rolling Fork

The Salt River (Anderson County)

ROLLING FORK WATERSHED